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Developing Self-love, Self-worth, and Body Image Acceptance through the Arts

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Abstract

Drawing from personal experiences as an artist-teacher, student, and woman the author develops a lesson plan designed to promote self-worth and body image acceptance for adolescents. The supporting teaching philosophy and unit rationale describe ways in which teachers can draw from art history and contemporary art to support and empower students. Through the creation of safe spaces teachers can develop platforms for students to express the challenges and triumphs they may experience as they struggle to accept their respective bodies and self-images.

Executive Summary

“Body Image” can be described as the way one views his or her body, how he or she believes to be perceived by others, a mental and physical connection with the body, and the way one chooses to be presented to the world (Nordqvist, 2014). Western society is obsessed with the notion of body image. Every day people think about how they will dress, how they look, what people think of them, what they eat, and any number of notions revolving around the body.

Capturing and depicting the essence of the human form has been ingrained in human culture for 30,000 years. The ‘Venus of Willendorf’ is the first known depiction of the human form and illustrates the responsibilities women had at the time through its exaggerated representation of female body parts. In ancient Greek society, artists and scientists used perfect proportions and mathematics to depict a God-like body. The Greeks surpassed the natural beauty of the human figure and represented human forms that were too perfectly proportioned to be realistic. Today, through the media and a constant stream of images, humans are inundated with pictures of the utopian body. Advertisements, social media, media, the influence of family and friends, cultural norms, and society dictate what represents a perfect figure.

Many people wrestle with body image and identity. Some resort to extreme measures to look a certain way and others may worry less frequently or drastically about their bodies. In schools, students are introduced to the concept of body image and are taught about changes that they might experience as they grow and become adults. However, from my personal experience and observations, there is a large

disconnect between what is being taught in the classroom and the students' ability to learn to love themselves and their bodies. Students learn to compare themselves to others at a young age, they are not given tools or coping strategies to deal with the overload of media and imagery they experience, and they are not given the opportunity to explore their identity or their uniqueness as individuals.

Mason and Vella (2013) point out, "that individuals develop a self-image via their reflection very early in life; and they may decide to change themselves due to the judgments of the people they interact with, or perhaps, rebel against change" (p. 239). I want to give students the opportunity to discover who they are and the opportunity to love their bodies and their minds. If ideas about body image and identity are shaped at early stages in an individual's life, it is my duty as an educator and an artist to offer a platform for students to develop a healthy self-image. In my capstone, I strove to create a unit plan that opens a discussion and dialogue about body image within the safe space of the art classroom.

I developed the capstone "Developing Self-love, Self-worth, and Body Acceptance through the Arts" for teachers to use in a high school art setting. Inspiration was drawn from my own experiences with body image and extensive research done on the topic. I researched different components of body image and how it affects humans' physical and mental well-being.

I also researched the benefit of project-based teaching through the arts and how that could be fused with the teaching of self-love and body awareness. Project-based learning is "a pedagogical approach that engages learners in focused inquiry-based learning projects, which require problem solving, decision-making, investigation, and

reflection” (Marshall & D’Adamo, 2011, p.14). The lessons and philosophies of this capstone are based on projects and inquiry, which will enhance student learning and awareness.

In the art classroom, students are engaged daily and developing works of art based on art techniques and concepts. It is an ideal setting for students to engage with curriculum based on body image and identity. The lessons of the capstone will allow students to realize the potential and necessity of the body, to see the differences between an individual’s perception of his or her self and the perception of the self by society, and to question society’s definition of the perfect body.

Two out of the three lessons created in the capstone are self-portraits. Reflection upon the self is crucial to understanding different perceptions and realizing the potential and beauty held within oneself. Kathryn Grushka (2011) describes the importance of the self-portrait: “the self- portrait or self-authoring as imaging incorporates meaning-making activities from the orientations of the intrapersonal, cognitive and interpersonal domains of development...” (p.113). Students will examine who they are in different facets of their lives and connect visual representation and exploration with new and positive views about themselves and their bodies.

Aiming to achieve a certain look or body type is exhausting and negatively affects humans’ psyche and physical being. Pressure from media sources, social and cultural norms, friends and family, and the consistent comparisons made on a daily basis can lead people to hate themselves and their bodies (Haas, Pawlow, Pettibone, & Segrist, 2012).

At a young age, we are taught to look, act and be a certain way with little understanding or tolerance for differences. School should be a place where students learn to love their differences and embrace what makes them stand out. Art is a means of expressing oneself and there is no better way to learn to cherish one's own beauty than by expressing it through artistic endeavors. I want to give students the space and freedom to find their selfhood and to be proud of who they are.

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Chapter 1

Teaching Philosophy

The art room has the unique capability to transform, nurture, and educate students. Students who enter the art classroom are exposed to different cultures and ways of problem solving, given the opportunity to express and explore identity, and allowed to navigate conceptual ideas through artistic and intellectual practices. In addition, art is a realm where all subject matters can be integrated, including science, math, literacy, music, and history. Also, teachers should strive to instill a sense of self-worth and self-respect in students who enter the classroom.

In order for students to reach and excel in higher levels of art and art practice, it is imperative that they have a strong understanding of the fundamentals of art. The traditional fundamentals of art include the elements and principles of design, basic understandings of various techniques and mediums, and an ability to brainstorm and plan creatively.

For years, the art teachers have embraced the notion of teaching fundamentals to students before they can proceed to more advanced classes. These classes are often called “studio” art classes and introduce the basics of 2D and 3D art, the elements and principles of design, and other basic principles of art. One will hear students complain of boring art classes and how students were told to copy paintings from the masters or draw a still life that had no relevant meaning to their interests or lives. Although both of these lessons have value, there are ways to teach technique to students while still engaging them through the creation of unique and meaningful work.

Students should not engage in “cookie-cutter art”, when the product looks the same as the rest of the class, or mundane and painstaking projects that have been done for years and years. Teachers should implement lessons that are technique-based but which tap into student interests. In addition, problems or characteristics of the community and individual exploration and problem solving should be integrated in art.

Olivia Gude (2013), a contemporary art educator, posits:

Art projects are appropriate building blocks for visual art curriculum because good art projects encode complex aesthetic strategies, giving students tools to investigate and make meaning. Good art projects are not old school art-style recipes to achieve a good-looking product. Quality art projects are also not mere exercises in which students manipulate form according to teacher-prescribed parameters without any intrinsic purpose. (p. 7)

Giving students the opportunity to learn technique, critical thinking, and allowing them to explore modes of problem solving will ultimately allow students to flourish in higher art classes and in other subject areas.

Problem solving and discovering unique ways to interpret and produce works of art is critical in art education. As previously stated, students should not be creating cookie-cutter art. Likewise, students should not brainstorm or complete projects in a cookie-cutter manner. From the start of an art project to the end of an art project, students learn how to navigate methods of problem solving. In a contemporary art room, students are given a lesson, usually with a deeper concept, and they must internalize the information, synthesize new learning with previous knowledge, brainstorm ideas, and begin to construct art through material usage and an understanding of concepts.

Every student approaches problems in different ways; consequently, art educators should embrace the idea that every student will approach an art project in a different way. This will enhance the learning experience for the individual but also for the other students who may benefit from observing their peers. Zande, Warnock, Nikoomanesh, and Dexter (2014) point out that “in life and in work, we are involved with groups of people who have different perspectives, knowledge, and skills, and who collectively add value to their community” (p. 20). Students are stimulating their own learning and understanding of concepts through the dynamic and functional nature of problem solving.

Problem solving in the art room translates to other areas in school and life. Problem solving manifests “through prediction of events, estimation of probabilities, reasoning about cause and effect, and drawing conclusions” (Pitri, 2003, p.21) which are skills needed in everyday life. Art is a tool that can teach students how to identify challenges and the means in which to overcome them. Pitri also points out, “conceptual problem solving rooted in children's interpersonal and practical challenges is related to thinking about or reconsidering the focus or goals of personal actions to serve the purpose of representation” (p. 20). In other words, students use their own strengths to translate their thinking into representation. Representation is not limited to the art room; however, the art room is a place where students learn to use their strengths, prior and new knowledge, and the community to problem solve.

Developing the ability to creatively problem solve allows students to utilize these tools in different subject areas. Likewise, it is important that art educators incorporate interdisciplinary lessons in their classrooms. Art is a uniquely multifaceted and

integrative subject that is influenced by many disciplines. For example, science is an integral part of ceramics, math is an important concept in life-like drawing and architecture, history is essential in understanding culture and artistic antiquity, and writing is fundamental to the development of artists. Not only are different subject matters inherent in art but they can also be incorporated and infused in art lessons to heighten students' learning and interests.

Incorporating interdisciplinary lessons in art education helps students make connections to the relevance and importance of art. In such, "visual art instruction should emphasize art's unique perspective and not become a handmaiden for other disciplines" (Ulbrecht, 1998, p.16) and should "find meaningful overlaps and connections between and among various disciplines" (Buffington, 2011, p.5).

Furthermore, in the art room students should be exposed to a variety of cultures and historical contexts. Not only is it important to embrace the various cultures represented in the classroom, but also it is important to expose students to cultures from around the world. Exposing students to different cultures and backgrounds will foster respect, understanding, and awareness. Ryan Shin (2010), a Korean art educator studying this subject states:

The study of ethnic visual culture can broaden student's perspectives by helping them understand how everyday objects relate to and express social and cultural values of minority groups. Also, by contrasting cultural values and beliefs of majority and minority groups, students can begin to develop mutual understanding and respect among them (p. 38)

In addition, artistic practices, representations and techniques differ widely from culture to culture. Studying these differences can allow students to see how art can be achieved and represented in more ways than one. For example, technique and materials vary depending on the natural resources available and artistic representation varies depending on traditions. Studying these differences supports students' development as artists and allows them to employ varying techniques and modes of problem solving in other artistic endeavors.

Furthermore, teaching students that art can be a tool to study history and traditions will benefit them in other subject areas and for standardized tests. Zwirn and Libresco (2010) encourage the idea that art can be a tool to learn about history and different ethnicities: "Analyzing images, including fine arts, can support the growth of basic historical literacy abilities by stimulating students to analyze artistic ideas, take positions and defend them, examine the world of visual images they live in, and ask new questions and produce historical information in novel ways" (p. 34).

Cultural and artistic representation in art education has often revolved around and been limited to Western culture and philosophies (Shin, 2010). Western culture should not be ignored in the art room; however the histories and contributions of other cultures are continuously marginalized. By neglecting these cultures art educators have, in extension, neglected the varying cultures represented in the classroom. Presenting and discussing a wide variety of cultures can give students the opportunity to explore and express their own culture and uniqueness while fostering an understanding of different groups.

Similar to the notion of exploring and teaching about different cultures is the idea that teaching art should be a tool for students to explore their own identity (Allison, 2009). Identity, “the state of having unique identifying characteristics held by no other person or thing” (*Collins English Dictionary*, 2015) is a complex notion composed of many facets including: one’s heritage, relationships, interests, and knowledge of the self (Young, 2013). Identities are changing constantly and transform depending on surrounding environments, changing relationships, and the past, present, and future. Art projects give students the opportunity to explore and express their identities through storytelling and the sharing of experiences.

Olivia Gude (2009) describes the act of telling one’s story as a way to form identity and shape experiences through the retelling and reexamination of imagery and detail:

Therein, the student/artist/maker thus shapes and reshapes self—through recalling felt, lived experience and then interpreting, re-shaping, this felt experience in material form, utilizing systems of meaning that have been developed by others...The realm from which student artists can make personal meaning is greatly enlarged by the introduction through art education

experiences of a wide range of contemporary and traditional art and ideas. (p. 8)

Art education can create an environment in which students develop a sense of self and identity. Through the arts students can increase their self-respect and respect for others in the community. Through the study of art, storytelling, and self-examination, art teachers help students form an understanding of identity.

Perhaps the most important aspect of teaching and art education is allowing students to develop self-respect and self-worth. As teachers, we are mentors and part of our job is to nurture and encourage students to grow into intelligent, responsible, and well-rounded adults. However, it is also our responsibility to teach and help students to love themselves and their accomplishments.

Art can be a tool in the development of a sense of accomplishment, respect, community building, and self-confidence. When Rachel Williams (2004) introduced empowering art to a group of incarcerated women who had been physically, sexually, and emotionally abused, she found that “creating art connected to personal experience within groups, [improved] people's self-respect, [increased] self-confidence, [brought] people together, [developed] creativity, and [changed] the way one views their life” (p. 48).

These women had lost all sense of power and self-worth. Yet, through the integration and expression of art, they were able to regain some sense of worthiness, power, and respect. As an aspiring teacher and art educator, I believe that it is my job to help students develop a strong sense of empowerment, self-worth, and self-respect. As students navigate adversity, an unavoidable part of life, they will be able to endure and persevere if they believe in, and love, themselves.

While students learn the fundamentals of art, a crucial part of art education, students can learn about the basics of art and problem solving. In addition, students can develop connections and understanding of their own identity and of varying cultures around the world. Most importantly, art is a vehicle which allows students to grow into strong, confident, and socially aware human beings.

Chapter 2

Completed Artworks Pertaining to Body Image



Thomann, L. (Artist). (2013). *Body Dysmorphia 1, 2, and 3* [Acrylic on clothing].



Thomann, L. (Artist). (2014). *Body Dysmorphia* [Photograph].

Thomann, L. (Artist). (2014). *Body Dysmorphia* [Photograph].

The *Body Dysmorphia* series began in the fall of 2013 and concluded in the spring of 2014. My interest in body dysmorphic disorder, or a “disorder characterized by persistent and intrusive preoccupations with an imagined or slight defect in one's appearance” (ADAA, 2010-2015) informed this body of work. It is human nature to obsess about how we look and how we believe others view us, which, in turn, shapes our understanding of body image.

This series of artwork takes a critical, and somewhat comical, look at body dysmorphic disorder and the obsessions and misperceptions humans have about their bodies. Each piece of clothing has a part of the body painted on it. The size of the body painted upon the clothing is the opposite of the size of the clothing. For example, the size of the dress in *Body Dysmorphia 2* is a size 0; however, the body painted atop it is a size 16. In the opposite nature, the leggings are a size extra-large but the body painted on the clothing is a medium. Therefore, when the wearers don the clothing they will permanently have the incorrect body attached to them, as seen in the photographs.

This approximates the effect of body dysmorphic disorder because the reflection in a mirror or camera is going to be skewed regardless of how the real body is shaped beneath it. The permanency of the acrylic paint represents the overwhelming concern some have of their body and the inescapable confusion and self-doubt one might feel.



Thomann, L. (Artist). (2014). *Self-Portrait* [Acrylic on canvas].



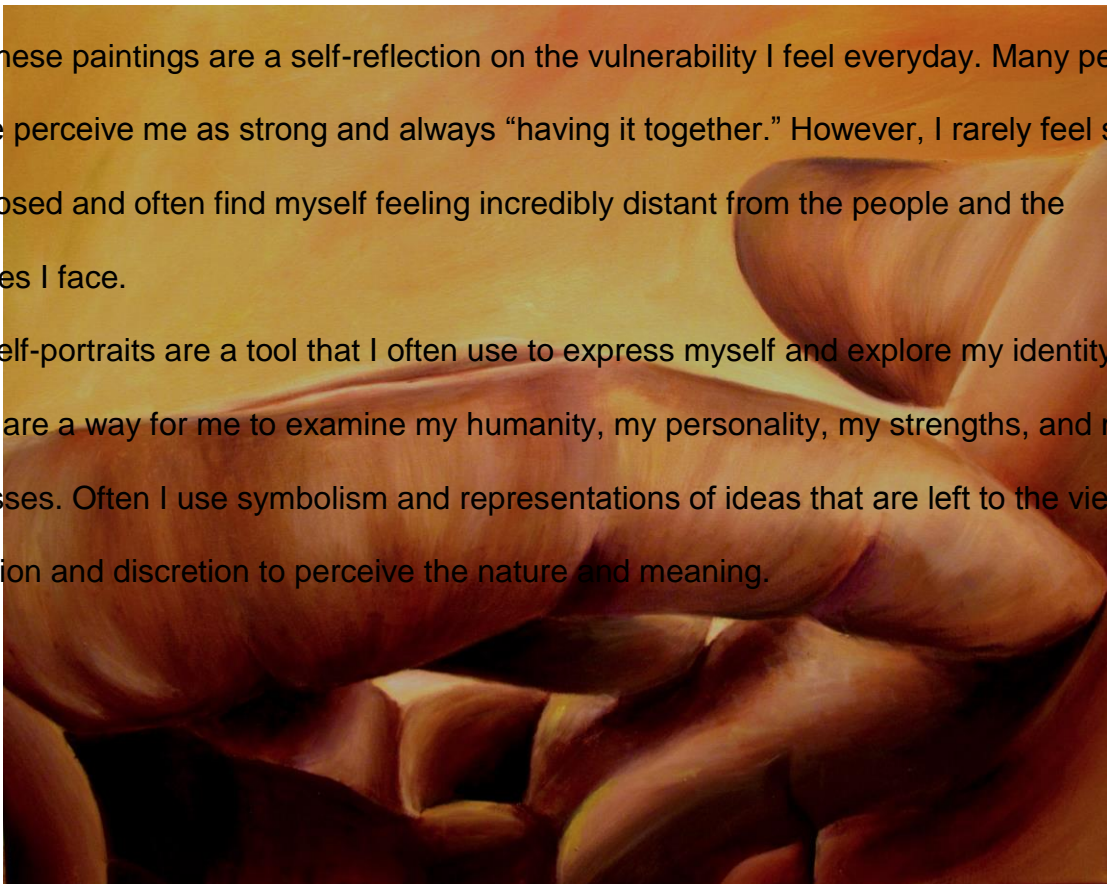
Thomann, L. (Artist). (2012). *Smoking Gun* [Pastel, pencil, charcoal, ink, watercolor, on paper].



Thomann, L. (Artist). (2011). *Student* [Pastel, pencil, charcoal, ink, watercolor, on paper].

These paintings are a self-reflection on the vulnerability I feel everyday. Many people in my life perceive me as strong and always “having it together.” However, I rarely feel strong or composed and often find myself feeling incredibly distant from the people and the challenges I face.

Self-portraits are a tool that I often use to express myself and explore my identity. Self-portraits are a way for me to examine my humanity, my personality, my strengths, and my weaknesses. Often I use symbolism and representations of ideas that are left to the viewer’s imagination and discretion to perceive the nature and meaning.



Thomann, L. (Artist). (2014). *Affection* [Acrylic on canvas].



Thomann, L. (Artist). (2014). *Comfort* [Acrylic on canvas].

Comfort and *Affection* are exaggerations of the parts of my body which I am most proud of and allow me to complete the activities that I love. For most of my life I have hated my body and found many reasons to say and do terrible things to it. I am learning to find reasons and parts of my body, which I love and consider beautiful and worthy. My hands allow me to create works of art, play sports, and express myself.

Chapter 3

Body Image Unit Plan

Personal Statement

I was in second grade when I realized I was bigger than everyone else. I was in fourth grade when one of my female classmates told me my thighs were fat. I was in seventh grade when a male classmate told a group of people I was a giant. I was still in middle school when I decided that I was ugly and ashamed of my body. I was in eighth grade when I first decided to try to lose weight. I was a senior in high school when I lost 70 pounds and developed an eating disorder and chronic depression. I was 18 when I went into a recovery center for eating disorders and mental health. I was 19 when I decided to make art about body image. I am 21 and have realized I have only one beautiful, capable body and I should treat myself with respect.

Growing up, talking about my body and body image was not acceptable in large social settings and, simply, was not done. I come from a supportive family and my parents always reassured me that I was beautiful and they would always love me. However, beyond my family and small gatherings, I was inundated with images in the media, on television, and in schools of girls that looked nothing like me. By society's standards, my classmates', and my own standards those bodies were so incredibly perfect. Those girls had a body that I dreamt about, that I wished I had, and that was impossible for me to have. I realize now, that their bodies were impossible for me to

have because I will never be able to have another's body, regardless of any differences or similarities.

In school, I learned about drugs, alcohol, and safe sex for many years. However, I received two weeks of instruction and information on mental health in middle school and three weeks in high school. As a class we were broken into groups of four and were instructed to research one mental illness. The mental illnesses ranged from depression and schizophrenia to eating disorders and anxiety. Groups then presented a five-minute PowerPoint on the given mental illness. Unfortunately, there were no real life connections, discussions, or dialogue about the subjects; there was no talk of acceptance or understanding.

In life, the images of perfect bodies and ideals from peers, teachers, coaches, magazines, television, and all forms of popular culture overwhelmed me. Yet there was never a discussion or dialogue in the classroom about bodies being different, unique, and beautiful. That everybody, no matter what race, religion, clothing preference, size, gender, or other factor was exceptional and valuable in his or her own right.

The idea of becoming perfect and having the perfect body consumed me. I hated my body and that hate and confusion drove me to seek a different body at all costs. I lost weight. I lost 70 pounds in 10 months. I lost my period. My hair fell out. I had intense panic attacks. I had depression. However, I gained everything I had wanted. I was skinny. I was complimented all the time for my looks. Unfortunately, some things had stayed the same: I loathed my body.

Like many people in our society, I became a number, a statistic. I became one of 24 million people in the United States with an eating disorder. I became one in ten

people who receive treatment and help for an eating disorder but I am not, thankfully, part of the 4-5% who die from his or her eating disorder (ANAD, n.d.).

Not everyone who struggles with body image develops a diagnosable eating or mental disorder. However, the overwhelmingly negative way people view the body is something that needs to be addressed in society. Although the art room is an excellent platform to teach self-acceptance and love, we, as educators and mentors, should be teaching it across subject areas. Teaching self-love and acceptance is imperative to the happiness and well being of our youth because:

Even relatively minor body concerns may lead to exercise avoidance in women; use of anabolic steroids and other drugs to try to increase muscularity, particularly in men; unhealthy eating behaviors, especially in women...; inability to quit smoking, particularly in woman; avoidance of self-examination for signs of skin cancer...; and desire for cosmetic surgery with associated health risks.

(Grogan, 2011, p.758)

For example, a curricular-based study by Kimberly L. Oliver and Rosary Lalik (2001) examined how four adolescent girls experienced their bodies and the “analysis of [the] data revealed two major themes: *being noticed* and *regulating their bodies*. The girls experienced beauty as a means for being noticed by boys and accepted by girls...all four girls expressed dissatisfaction with their bodies and described active and strategic efforts to monitor, restrict, and control them” (p. 303). Children in school should be taught that the body they have is outstandingly beautiful, full of worth, and a piece of art within itself. One’s body should not be used for the satisfaction of others nor should

it be viewed with any sort of disdain or dissatisfaction. I propose that the art room is an ideal setting to nurture the idea that every body is valuable, lovable and unique.

The following unit plan rationale and subsequent unit plan expands on the notion that body image should become a conversation with in schools. The unit plan is designed for high school students to explore their identity, relationship to their bodies, and build respect for themselves and their peers. Students should learn to come to terms with, love, learn about and accept their bodies. The unit plan includes a TED talk, which will open a dialogue on the presence of media in society, exposure to contemporary artists, multiple modes of art making, and literacy skills.

Unit Plan Rationale

“Body image” is a phrase that is widely used within our society and in popular culture. Body image is a culmination of ideas and the physical, as well as, mental perceptions of one’s body. Body image is composed of the way an individual perceives their own body, the way that person believes their body is perceived by others, physical body awareness and movement, how that person chooses to present the body, and how mentally connected one feels to the body (Nordqvist, 2014).

The way one feels about the body changes on a daily basis. Small changes and feelings can affect one’s perception of the body for the day. For example, feeling as if a pair of pants is too small and being overly aware of how one looks in those pants can negatively affect one’s perception of body image. On another day, this person could have an endorphin boost from working out, leaving him or her confident and happy with his or her body.

These small changes are normal and make us human; everyone feels differently about certain things on a daily basis. However, the increasingly negative view of body image, the taboos and stigmas of addressing the body, and the extremes people resort

to in order to achieve the perfect body are what need to be

challenged in our children’s perception of body image.

The idea of perfecting and depicting the human body has been part of our history since the first body was represented 30,000 years ago. The ‘Venus’ of Willendorf (fig.1), discovered in 1908, is a prehistoric representation of a female figure. The breasts, hips, and vagina of the sculpture are greatly exaggerated and the figure is



Figure 1. Nude Woman: Venus of Willendorf, (c. 28,000 B.C.E – 25,000 B.C.E.). Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Venus_of_Willendorf.

devoid of a face. This figurine is thought to represent a fertility god and is a representation of the primary responsibility, women held in that time, to bear children.

Since then, depicting and capturing the figure has become a part of human culture and practice. The body, however, is rarely represented as it truly is and is instead represented as the ideal of the time and culture. In the case of the Venus of Willendorf, the woman depicted is the essence of what a woman did: reproduce.

Capturing the human body became an aesthetic, scientific, and ambitious endeavor throughout history. The ancient Greeks valued the muscles and athleticism of the human body. The artists and mathematicians exaggerated muscles, contours, and the lengths of limbs in order to create sculptures that triggered the human brain to be attracted to more perfect proportions than is humanly possible. Figure 2 makes it apparent that it was equally impossible for men to reach such a height of perfection as it was for women.

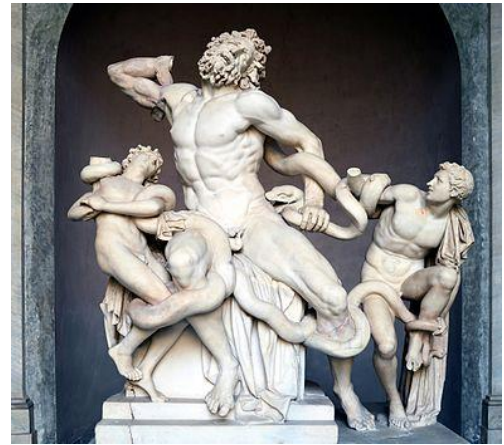


Figure 2. Bandinelli, B. (1520-1525). Laocöon and his Sons. Retrieved from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laocoön_and_His_Sons.

In following centuries, depiction of the body, specifically female, would change depending on religion, fashion, and society. Even in today's culture the media, social norms, and advertisements manipulate the ideal perception of the perfect body.

Striving for the perfect body is ingrained in mankind's history, as evidenced throughout history. Humans have striven to capture the body, as it should be, as society wants it to be, instead of representing the beauty of the individual body that transcends

society. More often than not, humans' bodies have changed throughout historic representation based upon society, sexualization, and perceptions of beauty. Using art to explore student's perception of body image and 'self' can allow students to "[immerse] in the sensuous materials of the world, [allow] the child to vividly experience his/her separate self, his/her uniquely personal idiom of feeling and making" (Gude, 2009, p.7).

The process of making art and discussing works of art is physical and intellectual. Every artist's mode and means of making is unique, as is, the link between how the mind works and its perceptions of how the body moves and experiences life. Creating art and using materials allows students to experience the world, to feel and build meaningful experiences, and to create a connection to and respect for the 'self'.

Rachel Mason and Raphael Vella (2013), two accomplished art educators, artists, and authors, state, "the combination of physical, cognitive and social changes that occur during early adulthood, together with critical decisions faced at this time spur...an identity crisis" (p. 243). Adolescents are faced with many changes and hard choices at this time in their lives. The way they interact with the world, the people they interact with, and the variables that influence them are especially poignant and important at this time in their development. Therefore, it is imperative that students and adolescents shape their identity and perception of the body in a positive way. Art and the manipulation of materials can be an important platform to discuss and harbor positive body image.

Art and the making of art can open a dialogue about body image that is lacking in the school systems. Everywhere children turn they are inundated by imagery in the

media, school, popular culture, and the individual's culture. Comments about achieving a certain look depending on family, media, and culture start at a young age (Moorhead, 2012). High school teachers could perpetuate and nurture students' self-love, self-respect, and self-worth if we implemented art lessons about body image at a young age and continued to discuss and affirm the beauty of the individual throughout an individual's schooling.

In 2013, Tara Chittenden, a qualitative researcher based in London, published an article, which documented the creation and navigation of using art to understand body image and identity. An undergraduate female student of painting used historical art and the act of making her own art to understand, morph, and create an identity. The author documented and interviewed the student for three years to see how she built and navigated her identity. Tara Chittenden observed "the self-conscious nature of composing and representing oneself in a painting" (p.57) and how the student uses that to "negotiate her emerging identity, both as an artist and a female" (p.57). This student lost a certain sense of self-worth and respect due to the aforementioned comparisons and media pressure and felt embarrassed and ashamed of her body. She used art to navigate her sexuality, her confidence, and her construction of identity.

Students will negotiate their identity and body in the first lesson of the unit plan. Inspired by the work of contemporary artist, Janine Antoni, students will come to realize the importance and beauty of everyday activities and associate it with the way their body and mind enhances and/or allows these activities and tasks to occur. Often, artists use art to try to navigate a blurry understanding of the body. However, Antoni portrays a confident understanding and awareness of the body that will be useful for students to

study and emulate. Antoni “[transforms] everyday activities such as eating, bathing, and sleeping into ways of making art, Antoni’s primary tool for making sculpture has always been her own body” (“Janine Antoni”, 2012).

Like Antoni, students will perform everyday activities in small groups during the class. Around the room stations will be set up with activities and tasks done on a daily basis. There will also be a station that will allow the students to perform tasks that they do on a daily basis but were not part of the other stations.

Through video and photography, students will capture how the body moves through space, operates as a moving unit, and how the body could be used or viewed as art. Although the tasks are mundane, students will enact the tasks and reflect on the importance of each task and how the body interacts and moves depending on the task. A simple lift of the arm to brush one’s teeth is not something we think of as being important or beautiful. However, if you have the ability to do so, it is a treasure. Not only is the act itself important, but the movement can be seen as a choreographed dance through life.

After performing and processing the outcome of the prompts, students receive an essay prompt, “*In 5-7 paragraphs describe various tasks and activities that are important to everyday functioning. How does our body allow us to accomplish and fulfill these tasks? Describe at least three ways your body is a treasure based on what you have learned and found in the performance and discussion done in class*”. The essay allows students to articulate clearly and precisely how they were affected by the lesson, allows students to identify concrete examples of how their bodies are worthy and should be treasured, and is a foundation for the other lessons.

Students of all abilities will be able to perform and experience this lesson.

Modifications can be made for students with disabilities. Every student will perform activities that they are capable of achieving. Each person will perform a task that they are capable of doing every day, with or without help. Therefore, each class may have different stations due to the different dynamics of the classroom.

Alison Hermon and Roy Prentice (2003) explored how students with disabilities navigate body image and observed:

A fundamental feature of art and design education is the promotion and encouragement of alternative and highly personal ways of responding to experience...rich opportunities exist for pupils in special schools to challenge negative attitudes through their art and design education by promoting a positive view of their difference whilst also reflecting inclusive values. (p.270)

Every student will have the opportunity to experience and reflect upon how amazing an individual's body can be by exploring the unique ways an individual navigates through the world.

Students will be able to link together prior knowledge, the new exposure to contemporary artist Janine Antnoi, and a newfound understanding or realizations about body image. Linking these things together and creating a positive experience with body image establishes scaffolding that can be enhanced by further positive experiences.

In the second lesson, Cameron Russell, a super model, speaks about how society and her family perceive her and how she views herself. There is a striking disconnection and difference between the way she sees herself and the way society views her. At the beginning of the talk, she purposefully manipulates the audience's

perception of her by wearing a tight short, black dress and stilettos, and having her hair freely down. While on stage, she changes her image by wearing a colorful, apron-like long skirt over her tight black dress, donning practical shoes, and tying her hair back. She remarks upon how the audience's perception may have been different if she had come out on stage dressed as a 'proper' and 'normal' woman.

It is important that students recognize the disparity between society and the self. Society does not have complete power or dictatorship over an individual's body or the way the individual perceives his or her body. Russell (2012) states, "I'd also note that I'm quite privileged to be able to transform what you think of me, um, in a very brief ten seconds. Not everyone gets to do that" (0:54). Humans allow society to dictate how they are perceived and how they represent themselves.

As Russell says, "image is powerful. But, also, image is superficial" (1:37) and the image humans allow others to see is usually a superficial representation. Having to consistently conform to a superficial image is mentally debilitating to both the individual and the individual's creativity.

I have witnessed the shift from uninhibited creativity to self-consciousness as students grow and learn they are flawed, and therefore, less than worthy. Students of a young age, such as a kindergarten, have a developing sense of body image and awareness. However, their creativity is far less encumbered by outside influences and their willingness to express a source of inspiration, thought process, and individuality is less marred by a self-conscious awareness. However, as students grow, they are inundated by the 'perfect' body and way of being, they look at themselves and deem themselves imperfect. They compare their bodies and minds to the people around them:

peers, celebrities, family members, athletes, etc. Mason and Vella (2012) point out, “individuals develop a self-image via their reflection very early in life; and they may decide to change themselves due to the judgments of the people they interact with, or perhaps, rebel against change” (p.239).

Changing one’s perceived identity and image can cause an identity crisis and subsequent struggle to identify what we are as individuals versus who we are based on society. This judgmental outlook on the self translates directly into creativity and the willingness to express oneself in the most vulnerable and truthful way. If students are so ashamed by whom or what they may be, there is, absolutely, no way they will be willing to express themselves truthfully through art. However, art is a universal platform that can create equality and allow students to reach a potential and mutual respect they may never have thought possible.

Nevertheless, creating a truly safe space is a difficult and nuanced task. Although I have some theories and practice on how to achieve this, the dynamic of each class will truly dictate how to create such a space. It is imperative that every student understands the rules and expectations of the class and participates in developing a safe classroom environment. Introducing lessons that expose students to different cultures and modes of thinking prior to these lessons will increase their understanding and respect of differences.

Students will create two self-portraits using two different lenses. The first lens will be the eyes and perceptions of society. Using mixed media (collage, paint, paper) they will create an image shaped by how they think others view them. They will also discuss and express the ways they change themselves to fit in with society. The second image

will depict how students perceive themselves based on personality, self-examination, and cultural awareness.

Challenging students to recognize how society wants them to be or act can allow students to push back on that idea and the 'norms' society sets. The second lesson will allow students to learn that they can create a shift of perception by examining how an individual is viewed by society and how the student wishes to be perceived. Through mixed media, discussions, self-examination and a critical look at society, students will embrace an image that represents their individuality and not a mass-produced image dictated by cultural stigmas. They will recognize an identity that is worthy of embracing, sharing, and possessing.

In the third lesson, and final lesson, students will construct a self-portrait using the definition of perfect, "absolute, complete", to create an abstract representation of how their body is absolute and complete the way it is. Unfortunately, "research has shown that media exposure to unattainable physical perfection is detrimental to people, especially women, and that the detrimental effects are currently more the rule than the exception" (Haas, 2012, p.405). In society, "attaining physical perfection" means that one seeks to attain a physical image that is popularized by a certain culture and society.

Everyone, regardless of his or her society or culture, is subjected to some form of longing for and comparison of an ideal body. Haas (2012) points out that in Western society:

There is clear evidence suggesting that the media's typical portrayal of women in advertisements has a negative effect on the way women feel about themselves (e.g., Groesz, Levine & Murnen, 2002; Hein-berg & Thompson, 1992; Jacobi &

Cash, 1994). With much research demonstrating that negative cognitions and feelings occur when women are exposed to ultra-thin female images, more research should examine what can be done to reverse these consequences...Women may directly model unhealthy eating habits presented in the media, such as fasting or purging, because the media-portrayed thin ideal body type is related to eating pathology. (p. 405)

Attaining this sense of perfection or striving to be something that someone is not is asking for the impossible. What needs to be understood and communicated to our students is that our ideal body is the body we possess and use on a daily basis.

If the definition of perfect is “lacking nothing essential to the whole; complete of its nature or kind” (Identity, n.d.) then we must learn to respect and admire the bodies we have, as complete and whole as they are. There are many definitions of perfect in the dictionary. However, this definition represents the importance of loving oneself as complete entity. An entity that, by definition, is already complete. If our bodies are perfect as a whole and complete the way they are then the body is not a void that needs to be filled or lacking something.

Athletes or students striving to become healthier and stronger should still understand that what their body is capable of, in the moment, is worthy and beautiful. Although they may strive to become faster, stronger, or fitter, their bodies are capable and complete the way they are even if the body changes. What the body is achieving is incredible and perfect.

Adolescents should not feel the need to take extreme actions to fit a certain image that others have deemed perfect. Striving for the impossible is according, to one

study, harmful, and illogical. Strahan, Wilson, Cressman, and Buote (2006) state:

The physical appearance of professional models should be viewed as unattainable. Models are selected from the thinnest 2% of the population and it is their full-time career to maintain and present an ideal appearance. Furthermore, they have a team of professionals who help them to achieve this goal at every stage of the process (Smolak, 1996; Wolf, 1991). Hence, striving for self-improvement by attempting to meet these standards is likely to cause women to pour their resources into a futile task, and to experience a spiral of disappointment and self-blame. (p. 223)

Students will have the opportunity to express the completeness and natural beauty of their bodies through an abstract representation of themselves and critically define the notion of 'perfection'. In this lesson, students will draw everything about themselves that makes them whole. Then, they will cut up those images into fragmented pieces, the way one might be torn down by society and even negative self-views, and rebuild a completed self-portrait using the fragmented pieces.

These lessons allow young adults to learn to accept and be their complete selves because that is the only way to feel confident and happy. Striving for the perfect body type, whatever society tells us that might be, is impossible, possibly harmful, and futile. Recognizing the potential and beauty within one's completely perfect self is a way for students to break down this notion and barrier.

Lesson 1: "Body as Treasure"	
Grade Level/Course:	High School
Unit Topic/Significant Idea:	Body Image
Instructor:	Lilly Thomann
Lesson Title:	Body as Treasure
Time Span:	In a classroom where students have art for 40-50 minutes daily, this lesson will take place over multiple weeks. It is composed of about four "parts" and each part could be done within a week.

What is the essential Question?

What do our bodies allow us to do?

Learning Objective:

Students will learn that they can treasure their bodies by studying everyday tasks performed by the body.

Linked Assessment Outcomes:

Students will discuss the concepts of body image and valuing the body based on its capabilities.

Students will perform everyday tasks and discuss why each is important and beautiful.

Students will analyze the different ways the body is used throughout the day and reframe their understanding of how much the body is in use.

Students will compare and contrast different ways their body is used and its inherent importance to who they are.

Activity Map (not to be completed in one day):

1. What is Body Image?
2. Show- <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/janine-antoni>
3. Discuss the importance of everyday activities and how they create the essence of life
 - a. Class discussion
 - b. Small group discussion
 - c. Think/pair/share
3. Introduce lesson
 - a. Performance piece
 - b. Essay
4. Groups of four begin to perform everyday tasks
5. Begin essay

Essay Question:

5-7 paragraphs

In 5-7 paragraphs describe various tasks and activities that are important to everyday functioning. How does our body allow us to accomplish and fulfill these tasks? Describe at least three ways your body is a treasure based on what you have learned and found in the performance and discussion done in class.

Vocabulary:

Treasure
Mundane
Performance art
Sculpture
Body Image
Life
Identity

Guided Discussion:

Essential Question:

What do our bodies allow us to do?

Introducing the “hook.”



What is this picture of? How can this body be put to use? What about on an everyday level?

Association Questions

What is your own definition of body image? Why do people talk about body image? Is this something that comes in the media? Is it something that you think people should talk about? Lots of people struggle with body image, not liking their body, not having self-worth or value-Do you think that people should appreciate their bodies? Why? What do our bodies allow us to do? How many of you have used a part of your body to do something this week? Today? Right now? Since our brain is part of our body it is in use constantly. What would happen if we were not allowed to use our bodies to do everyday activities? Like making coffee, playing soccer, brushing our teeth, drawing, waving, walking, talking, thinking, feeling... How did it make you feel to be unable to perform tasks? What do our bodies and minds allow us to do? What do they allow us to feel?

Teaching Materials/Equipment/To Do List:

- Images
- Think pair share
- Discussion material

Lesson 2: Juxtaposed Perceptions	
Grade Level/Course:	High School
Unit Topic/Significant Idea:	Body Image
Instructor:	Lilly Thomann
Lesson Title:	Juxtaposed Perceptions
Time Span:	3-4 weeks: The video and concept should be introduced the first day, along with the discussions and reflective writing. When brainstorming and creating the piece of art students will need about 4 weeks to complete it.

What is the essential Question?

What are the varying ways society perceives and understands me and how do they differ from the ways I perceive and understand myself?

Learning Objective:

Students will learn that they can use two different lenses, the lens of society and the lens of their own perceptions, to create juxtaposing self-portraits.

Linked Assessment Outcomes:

Students will examine the differences between their own perception of themselves and the perception of others.

Students will compare and contrast the body or person that society sees and the person or image that is most true to the individual's unique being.

Students will weigh the outcomes of the two lenses and express those interpretations through their self-portraits.

Activity Map:

1. TED Talk:
http://www.ted.com/talks/cameron_russell_looks_aren_t_everything_believe_me_i_m_a_model#t-43605.
2. How does society see me?-discussion/reflective writing
3. How do I see myself?-discussion/reflective writing
4. Go through magazines/draw the two different lenses
5. Introduce the lesson
6. Begin construction

Lesson Object:

After watching and discussing the TED Talk, students will discuss in large and small groups the way society sees them and the way they see themselves. It is important that students talk about these issues and aspects of body image in order to build confidence

and feel less alone. However, I recognize the difficulty that some students will face in talking about this in large groups. Therefore, students will have the opportunity to discuss these questions with class but also through individual reflective writing. Reflective writing will also serve as a “sketch” and brainstorm to refer back to throughout the completion of the project. After discussing the above questions and writing down ideas students will begin to sketch the different perceptions and use magazines to try to find some images that might fulfill the image of the two lenses. Once students have an understanding of the concept the final project will be introduced. Students will create two self-portraits, one self-portrait fashioned by the lens of society, and one fashioned with the lens of the self. Students can use mixed media (collage, paint, paper) to complete the self-portraits.

Vocabulary:

Body Image
Self-portrait
Identity
Society
Lens
Perception
Collage
Mixed Media
Juxtapose

Guided Discussion:

Essential Question:

What are the varying ways society perceives and understands me and how do they differ from the ways I perceive and understand myself?

Introducing the “hook.”

TED Talk:

http://www.ted.com/talks/cameron_russell_looks_aren_t_everything_believe_me_i_m_a_model#t-43605.

Association Questions

What happened at the beginning of the TED Talk? What did the model do to change the way the audience perceived her? What are some of the things they may have assumed or stereotyped about her before she changed? What are some of the points she made about images and manipulation in the TED Talk? At one point she says, “image is powerful. But, also, image is superficial”-what do you think she means by this? What are some the things society may think about you? How does that differ or remain the same when you think about who you are?

Teaching Materials/Equipment/To Do List:

-Vocabulary
-reflective writing (paper, pencils/pens)
-popular culture magazines

- computers
- paint
- brushes
- paper
- scissors
- glue

Lesson 3: “Absolutely Complete”	
Grade Level/Course:	High School
Unit Topic/Significant Idea:	Body Image
Instructor:	Lilly Thomann
Lesson Title:	Absolutely complete
Time Span:	In a classroom where students have art for 40-50 minutes daily, this lesson will take place over multiple weeks.

What is the essential Question?

If my body is “absolute, complete” and perfect means “absolute, complete” than what is a perfect body?

Learning Objective:

Students will learn that they can accept their bodies by examining the definition of perfect.

Linked Assessment Outcomes:

Students will discuss the definition of perfect and how it pertains to body image. Students will analyze why the given definition of perfect can transcend “normal” interpretations of the word.

Students will synthesize the stereotypical definition of perfect with new constructions of the definition in order to reshape the way they think about their bodies.

Students will consider what it means to be perfect.

Activity Map:

1. What does the word perfect mean? –discussion
2. How does the new definition of perfect differ from your brainstormed definitions?-discussion
3. What have we learned about body image up to this point? –small group discussion
4. Introduce the lesson
5. Individually brainstorm
6. Begin construction

Lesson Object:

Students will be asked what they think the word ‘perfect’ means. They will then be given the definition of perfect, “absolute, complete” and “lacking nothing essential to the whole; complete of its nature or kind” and they will be asked to discuss the differences and similarities between the two definitions. Small groups will briefly discuss body image and the previous knowledge attained through the previous lessons. As a class, the students will discuss how striving for perfection

is useless since the definition means whole and complete and that is what we are. Individually, students will list and brainstorm all the things that make them whole or complete both physical and mental. Students will then paint each component listed on a piece of paper. Then students will cut or tear out each element and construct a fragmented but completed and whole body of work. The body of work will represent their perfect, whole, and complete selves.

Vocabulary:

Body Image
Complete
Identity
Perfect
Perfectionism
Absolute
Whole

Guided Discussion:

Essential Question:

If my body is “absolute, complete” and perfect means “absolute, complete” than what is a perfect body?

Introducing the “hook.”

What does perfect mean? What does it mean to have a perfect body?

Association Questions

In all honesty think to yourselves, do I have the perfect body (the perfect body based on society’s notion or understanding of perfect)? I know I do not feel that I have the perfect body based on that definition. This is the definition I found of perfect “absolute, complete.” I feel that I am absolute and complete. What does it mean to be absolute or complete? I am who I am and that allows me to be complete. Am I perfect? Is the body I have perfect because it is complete the way it is? How can we utilize this definition of perfect to reshape our understanding of body image?

Teaching Materials/Equipment/To Do List:

- Images
- Definitions
- Discussion material
- Paint, paper, brushes, water, scissors, brainstorming paper, pencils

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